

The time is now for telecom reform

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I remember my childhood fondly, growing up in a close knit family. I used to look forward to going to my grandparents house during the summer. My grandparents used to have one phone in the hallway, and it shared a “party-line” with others in the community. My, how times have changed! The telecommunications industry is experiencing a technological and market place revolution. Most of the communications that once took place over traditional “wireline” telephones now take place over cell phones, e-mail, instant messaging, text messaging, “voice over the internet”, and other means of communications that were unheard of just a few years ago.

The days are long gone when consumers had only one choice for telephone service. Today, consumers are the beneficiaries of the competitive nature of the telecommunications industry. Consumers can obtain telecommunications services, both voice and data, from numerous providers.

In order for consumers to realize additional advantages of a competitive market place, national policy must be changed to recognize technological changes in the marketplace. Also, policy changes must allow for marketplace choice to govern the industry, not regulation. Real market based competition will allow consumers to reap the benefits of better pricing, improved service and increased product innovation.

Meaningful market based competition will only occur if policy makers in Washington write a national telecommunications policy that allows all companies to invest and compete head-to-head for customers. Government micro-management has always been a distant second to consumer choices in a free and competitive marketplace. The 1996 Telecom Act, which was the last time Congress revisited the nation’s telecom laws, was written for a world in which only cable providers could provide cable service and only telephone companies could provide telephone service.. Technology has eliminated these distinctions to the benefit of consumers who can choose from a variety of communications technologies. Technology has outpaced current rules.

Momentum is building for telecommunications reforms that will unleash the power of real competition. On July 27, 2005, Senator John Ensign (R-Nev.) introduced legislation designed to update the nation’s telecommunications laws and increase choices for consumers. Senator Ensign unveiled The Broadband Consumer Choice Act of 2005. “It is time to restore America’s status as a leader in the field of global communications technology and to improve burdensome and outdated government regulations for the benefit of consumers nationwide,” Ensign said. “Americans’ ingenuity and creativity can provide more choice for consumers if government bureaucrats will get out of the way and allow our companies to compete.” Senator John McCain (R-Ariz.) is a co-sponsor of this bill (S-1504). The United States Chamber of Commerce is supporting this legislation as are BellSouth, SBC, Verizon and a number of other telephone companies.

The United States presently ranks 13th in the world in broadband deployment, down from 11 in one year. How can the country that invented the Internet be falling behind so rapidly? I don't believe the answer is the lack of American ingenuity, but rather outdated government policy.

Once the national laws are changed to allow market-based competition, customers will be able to bargain for communications services that fit their needs at the prices they are willing to pay. The customer, rather than the government, will be in charge. These benefits will, in turn, create lower prices, more jobs, and increased investment in our communities.

The passage of the Ensign bill is extremely critical. I encourage you to contact Senators Lindsay Graham and Jim DeMint and ask them to support Senator Ensign's pending legislation.

The time is now for changes to be made in policies, which govern the telecommunications industry.

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